

Report

Petersburg National Battlefield

■ 1.0 Site Description

The 2,700-acre Petersburg National Battlefield preserves many of the historically significant sites associated with the Siege of Petersburg (see Figure 1) and other events during the final months of the Civil War. The Park is two and one-half hours south Washington, D.C. and 30 minutes south of Richmond, Virginia by car. The Park is bounded on the south and northeast by two interstate facilities, I-95 and I-295 respectively, and on the north by Virginia state route 36 (see Figure 2). The Park offers a signed driving tour, way-side exhibits and audio stations, as well as interpretive walking tours. The Battlefield was established by an act of Congress in 1926.

Figure 1. Poplar Grove National Cemetery



The Park receives over 400,000 visitors annually. Recreational visitors (those for whom visiting the Park is the primary trip principal purpose) account for one-quarter of this total. Commuter, or pass-by traffic, accounts for the balance.

The Park sprawls over several jurisdictions, in an increasingly developed suburban setting. The Park comprises 10 units, and 108 separate battlefields, which have been consolidated into six major battlefield sites.

Figure 2. Map of Petersburg National Battlefield

According to a study conducted by Economic Research Associates, Inc., the direct benefit of visitor spending to the local economy is in the range of \$5 million to \$8 million annually. Indirect and induced impacts add another \$3 million to \$6 million. The length of the average visitor stay is four hours. The potential to increase visitor impacts on the local economy is significant if the length of stay can be increased.

There are several long-term planning efforts underway which are related to the Park. The Petersburg National Battlefield draft General Management Plan (GMP) is expected to be released soon. The draft will call for an improved transportation system, and especially non-auto transportation, to improve visitors' experience of the Park. The Appomattox River Corridor Plan and the Dinwiddie County Trail Plan, both of which offer the potential for Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) access to the Park, are nearing completion as well.

■ 2.0 Existing ATS

There is currently no public transit service available to the Park. No information on access by bicycle or other non-auto means of conveyance is available. The main unit is designed for driving.

■ 3.0 ATS Needs

The physical separation of the Park units, coupled with increasing development and attendant congestion, inhibit efforts to present visitors with a coherent and comprehensive presentation of the Civil War's final battlegrounds. The transportation system connecting the various Park units serves several trip purposes, including commuter, commercial and other non-recreational trip purposes. The operating speeds, traffic volumes and noise levels of these facilities are far higher than ideal from the perspective of a Park visitor, and prevent all but the most determined visitors from a fragmented and partial experience of the Park. Efforts to design and implement a coherent signage system have not been successful, in part due to difficulties encountered in developing a standardized signing system among the jurisdictions involved. Lastly, there is no signage, transportation service or source of information that ties the several non-NPS Civil War-related attractions in the area with the Park in any meaningful way.

The internal Park road system does not encourage visitors to continue on to other Park units. The main unit has one internal one-way road, which terminates on the general purpose street system. From there, there is little guidance or encouragement to visit the other sites.

The need to improve access, mobility and wayfinding will be key themes in the Petersburg National Battlefield GMP. Several opportunities for ATS have been identified in the planning process leading up to this draft. Some possibilities include:

- Implementing some form of waterborne transportation system on the Appomattox River, between the Old Town section of Petersburg and the City Port. Some dredging may be required. This could be integrated with a rail tour on existing CSX lines (the North and West Railroad borders the Park on the east) as part of a loop by rail and water;
- Creation of a new tour route in the main unit, with transportation by horse-drawn carriages; and
- Creation of a new shuttle service which would circulate within the main unit of the Park and perhaps circulate to some of the other units. Park staff mentioned that a shuttle of the type used in Acadia National Park might work best.

■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

These ongoing planning efforts present additional opportunities for developing an integrated, multimodal tourist transportation system. The Petersburg National Battlefield should be considered a candidate for further study on the feasibility of ATS services. This assessment is based on the following considerations:

1. The Battlefield is not well integrated with other tourist attractions in the area, including those in the center of Petersburg;
2. The local community has expressed an interest in expanding mobility options by non-automobile modes of travel; NPS should expand its planning efforts to ensure it is well integrated with these efforts;
3. The Park's draft GMP presents several recommendations for ATS to improve the visitor experience and further other Park goals and objectives; and
4. Park staff have submitted an application for a grant to study the potential for ATS services to the central office.

■ 5.0 Persons Interviewed

Michael Hill, Superintendant